

Les Confessions d'Édouard

I first met Édouard Lachapelle some 15 years ago, when we were both participating in an artists' exchange with Cuba. We shared a bedroom then, and became pals. It was some time later that I began to attend his Sunday morning lectures on art history at the Conservatoire de musique de Montréal. I had been told that there was something special about them, but nothing prepared me fully for the experience, and as I became one of his faithful followers, my admiration only grew. On each occasion Lachapelle treated us to a brief introduction, then retired to the back of the room, from where he delivered an hour long wide-ranging treatment of the subject at hand, while, from his computer, texts and images succeeded themselves on the screen in front of us. Twice there was a pause in the proceedings, as one of the students from the Conservatoire appeared to perform a short musical interlude. And the lecture continued, shot through with sly humour, and surprising digressions that connected in enlightening ways with the central theme. The range in subjects was remarkable: from Napoleon to Notre-Dame to Venice to Van Gogh to the Cologne Cathedral to a contemporary artist such as Guy Lapierre.

Who is this man, I thought? Yes, he is a painter and printmaker and collector, he studied at the Université de Montréal, he founded an art revue, he was associated for an extended period of time with the galerie Frédéric Palardy, and he has curated numerous exhibitions over the years in Montreal and beyond.

But behind that curriculum vitae, there is a man whose life history, intertwined with the shifting landscape of Quebec itself, is a telling one, one that underlies the wisdom and insights, the passion and compassion, that infuse his public lectures. It is this history that we will probe, as Lachapelle himself inquires into art, artists, and art forms.

And what will we find?

A Catholic boyhood, private schooling where he found himself to be a bookish outsider, a growing passion for art history, a gradual affirmation of his own gay sexual identity, an increasing dependence on alcohol going back to a very early

age, a life that came very close to losing itself in an irreversible drift towards self-destruction, and a decisive drawing back from the brink. Thanks to... what?

Early on, Lachapelle became involved in the organization that evolved into "Les Impatients," a project that gives those afflicted with mental problems the opportunity to express themselves in drawing and painting. It is now an extensive undertaking with its own studio, and activities that culminate each year in a vast art auction that brings in large sums of money to finance the operation. Lachapelle was there from its earliest days, working closely with the individuals involved. And often found himself, in bed at night, bathed in tears. It was this experience that opened his eyes to his own perilous situation, and after a serious blackout following on a particularly acute bout with the bottle, he abruptly changed his ways, and became the man he is today.

Our film will portray a man whose incisive forays into the world of art are matched by a life that is an object lesson in and of itself.

-- Martin Duckworth, with Donald Winkler